

Houston W. Patrick Selected ECCC Alumnus of the Year

Houston W. Patrick of Martin, TN, was recently named Alumnus of the Year at East Central Community College in Decatur and will be recognized during the College's annual Homecoming festivities scheduled Saturday, October 13, 2007 on the Decatur campus.

Patrick said he was "absolutely stunned" when he heard College President Dr. Phil Sutphin informing him of the honor.

"This is, without doubt, one of the greatest honors anyone could receive," Patrick said. "The only comparable was my call to the ministry."

A Scott County native, Patrick is the son of the late Brooks and Grace Patrick and grew up in the Ringgold Community. He currently resides in Martin, TN, where he serves as Mayor of Weakley County and also serves as pastor of Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church, a position he has held for 41 consecutive years. He previously served Weakley County as Register of Deeds for 24 years.

Among career highlights are his selection for public office in a county where no "outsider" had ever been elected. He was also re-elected five terms in a county where the average is two.

But, he says his call to the ministry and being able to serve the same church for 41 consecutive years has been the most significant event in his life.

A serious heart attack sent Patrick into a short retirement in 2000, but after a few years of retirement and recovery, his peers asked him to return to public service.

"I retired after having a heart attack in 2000," said Patrick. "I stayed in retirement for four years before I was asked to run for this position I now occupy. A successful campaign put me back to work September 1, 2006. As chief executive officer, I perform basically the same type of things for the county as a governor would for the state."

In addition, he is past president of the Rotary Club, is a Paul Harris Fellow, served as president of the Tennessee Registers' Association, was Register of the Year in 2000 and served 12 consecutive years as chaplain of the Registers' Association. He was the first chairman of the United Way for Weakley County.

Of his days spent as an ECJC student, Patrick said, "My time at East Central was some of the most joyful and productive years of my early adulthood. This was a most significant time in solidifying the direction of my life."

His time at East Central Junior College began in 1952 when he arrived on campus with only \$5 in his pocket.

He explained, "My brother brought me to East Central on the day of testing for entrance scores. It poured rain so hard the old car flooded out twice on our way so that I arrived at 10 am instead of 8 am. Needless to say, my brother, James, was thoroughly disgusted with the entire fiasco.

"When we pulled up in front of Scott Hall, his remark was, "Hut, don't stay here." Though I only had \$5 in my pocket, I stayed the course. The second day I was on campus, I went job seeking. My good fortune was to encounter Dr. L.O. Todd (then College president) as he was leaving his office for lunch. Everyone else had already left. I explained my need for work if I were to stay beyond three days.

"His response was to say, 'Come on, son, I think I have a job for you.' He led me down to see Mr. (Andy) Miller, the head custodian, who handed me a straight broom and said, 'Your job will be to sweep this walk every morning at 5:30.' I gladly accepted the job and swept the walk all across the campus for two years at 5:30 in the morning."

He added, "My greatest fear on campus was when I had to go inside the girls dormitory while doing my chores. For a greenhorn freshman, the girls dorm was like going into a prison. Ms. Barber was the warden and Mrs. Sullivan was the assistant warden!"

Patrick eventually held three small jobs at the college, which he performed each day.

"I will always remember the kindness of Dr. L.O. Todd in helping me secure my first job at East Central," he said, "without which I could not have attended school at that time."

In addition to Dr. Todd, there were others on campus whom had a great impact on Patrick's life.

"Mrs. Stella Newsome was such a precious friend and teacher. She taught me that being poor was not a hindrance to becoming successful. She encouraged me to persevere in my quest for knowledge and excellence. She also knew that I worked three small jobs every day just to stay in school and she did not want me to become discouraged and possibly fall along the way.

"There were others that had a great impact on my life; notably, Mr. Palmer in the agriculture department; Mr. Frank Cross in chemistry; Mr. Bobo in social studies; Coach Billy Ray Lindsley in P.E.; Mr. Frank Leatherwood in the biology department; and also Mr. Roberts, Mr. LD Ferguson and Coach Arno Vincent. These were all mentors to me in various ways.

Patrick said he also enjoyed being on the East Central campus.

“Campus life at East Central was wonderful. I was able to secure enough work on campus to pay my expenses for the most part. On weekends, I worked for Mrs. Sullivan off campus, but I was a happy camper.

“My teachers were excellent and I was studying what I loved, which was agriculture and science. Life was a pleasure every day. No negatives!”

Among honors Patrick received was being selected treasurer of the agriculture club, associate editor of advertising for the Wo-He-Lo yearbook, treasurer of the student body association; and induction into Theta XI Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the International honor society of the two-year college.

After completing the associate’s degree at East Central, Patrick served two years in the military and then enrolled at Mississippi State University, where he completed his bachelor’s degree. At MSU, he was inducted into Alpha Zeta scholastic agriculture fraternity, Blue Key Honor Fraternity, and was elected president of the Agronomy Club.

He completed the master’s in education at the University of Tennessee.

Patrick is married to the former Maxine Cockroft of Sebastopol, also an EC alumnus (Class of 1961), who serves as an officer with First Citizens National Bank in Martin. They have one son, Joseph Madden Patrick, who resides in Spring Hill, TN with his wife, Jennifer.